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ABSTRACT

The community college has a distinct role in working cooperatively with the business community. Changes in the labor market and labor force and structural changes in the economy on both a domestic and international level are underscoring the important role community colleges can play in meeting the needs of industry for training and education. From the industrial point of view, however, the educational community cannot be counted on to deliver the desired product on time. Hampered by self-imposed restrictions, lack of a willing and technically prepared faculty, and legal and contractual barriers, community colleges have been slow to respond to business and industry's needs. Community colleges can gain a number of distinct benefits from working cooperatively with business and industry. Cooperative relations with business provides the community colleges with additional lobbying power, additional students, and a competitive position with respect to the growing number of proprietary schools. Industry also enjoys certain gains, including training at a realistic cost, better-qualified entry-level personnel, and tax advantages. Finally, the community at large receives its share of benefits as residents become more employable, industries remain in the community, and new industries are attracted. (EJV)

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VII.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND INDUSTRY:

RATIONALE FOR A RELATIONSHIP

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Introduction

In recent times, there has been a growing debate among educators regarding the role of the community and junior colleges. One group of educators perceives the community college as having a somewhat narrow focus, i.e., as the mechanism to prepare those entering its doors to make the necessary adjustment and transition between high school and/or the work environment to transfer to four year institutions. On the other hand, a second group of educators sees the community college fulfilling the need of the transfer student while at the same time serving as a vehicle to address the needs of the terminal student, business and industry, adult populations and a host of other special interest groups. A discussion of the two schools of thought previously described has undoubtedly been the subject of debate for some time now and any attempt to address such issues would be overwhelming. Instead, the intention of this brief paper is to select and explore one topic, the need for a relationship between the community college and business/industry.

Economic Issues

In the last decade or so, many American companies have been losing their competitive edge and their ability to dominate world-wide markets. Companies like International

Harvester and Western Electric are forced to terminate employees, thereby contributing to unemployment and generally weakening the economy at large. We are all aware of the litany of reasons attributed to this overall condition. As well we are also aware of the number of economic issues are confronting the American economy today. Unemployment the federal deficit, factory and plant closings, inflation, business failures, personal bankruptcies, and bank failures top the list. Coupled with these economic ills are the ever-present problems of the lack of skilled workers, adult literacy, dislocated workers and a graying/aging population.

In addition, the economy on both a domestic and international level is undergoing rapid structural changes that Americans are only now beginning to understand. Smokestack industries, once the heart of national and international trade are dying are being replaced by a very visible service economy which stresses high technology and robotics. Such activities and changes confirm the fact that we are entering a post-industrial society.[3]

While these activities are transforming industries throughout the nation at an rapid rate, a corresponding rate of employment has not occurred; the existing work force is not equipped to handle new and innovative machinery nor

does it possess the technical expertise needed to function both effectively and efficiently in what Toffler calls The Third Wave.[4]

Community Colleges and Industry: Reasons for Joint Efforts

Community colleges have the ability to work cooperatively with American business. In order to address itself to the needs of industry and to improve productivity levels one of the first actions to be taken is improving the workforce's skills "through training and education."[5] If this is to occur however community colleges must be willing to accept the challenge. In accepting this challenge, community colleges and their faculty need to "be more flexible and responsive to a rapidly changing environment."[6] Historically, community colleges have worked" effectively with local business. Cooperative relationships of these kinds are manifestations of the college's philosophy—providing high quality educational services and programs in response to community needs."[7]

However, from business and industry's point of view, there seems to be a problem present in such an arrangement. The educational community can not be counted on to" deliver the desired product on time."[8] Community colleges are encumbered by numerous self-imposed restrictions. For

example, some community college faculty, in a sense, are part of the problem: many are not available to participate in such business/college projects because of teaching schedule/conflicts; because they are not technically prepared to teach in specialized programs; because they lack the necessary expertise; and finally because they express a fear of change and tend to promote academic snobbery.[9] But all of the problems facing business-college relationship can not be blamed solely on faculty. Institutional barriers such as legal, philosophical, and contractual obligations deter such arangements. "As publically supported institutions many community colleges have faced legal and philosophical problems in providing contract training programs for individual companies."[10]

However, all is not bleak. A number of community colleges throughout the United States have begun to develop a variety of working relationships with industries. In part such a cooperative relationship is a direct result of the community college's role and philosophy. This direction is often contained within community colleges' mission and goals statements. Those colleges responding to the needs of business must provide "high quality educational services and programs".[11] If they don't make some real attempt to meet the

needs of industry, then industry will begin to run its own college. A recent study conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching entitled "Corporate Classrooms: The Learning Business" indicated that approximately "$60 billion is spent on corporate-run education".[12]

Creating Mutual Benefits

Community colleges can gain a number of distinct benefits by working cooperatively with the private/business sector. Recent tax revolts such as Proposition 13 (CA.) and Proposition 2½ (Mass.) as well as federal, state, and local cutbacks have proved almost beyond a shadow of a doubt that public financing for community colleges and four year institutions becomes increasing "difficult to obtain".[13] In addition to providing funding,

> the private sector has valuable resources that can be used to replace and supplement dwindling public dollars. Moreover, by working well with the private sector, the importance of public higher education to business can be demonstrated. These powerful allies, in turn, can persuade state legislatures and governors that greater support is needed and deserved by public institutions. [14]

In other words, such arrangements lend support to the political process by allowing for added political lobbying muscle.

Community colleges can seek to gain additional students, especially significant in today's dwindling post-secondary college bound population. These new populations can replace and to some degree bolster falling FTE levels and thereby allow colleges to continue to operate.

Perhaps the final and most important reason for the community college to engage in a meaningful educational dialogue with industry is the onslaught of proprietary schools. These non-profit and for-profit schools have literally sprung up throughout the country over the past decade. Such schools are approved to offer students financial aid, assure job placement and are not wedded to conventional instructional hours and schedules. There viability, at the expense of the community college, is based on the inability of community colleges and other post-secondary schools to provide competent educational services to industry.

In addition to fiscal benefits, community colleges are fortunate in the sense that they are

> tied internally to local businesses through their administrative structure. The members of the local colleges' Board of Trustees are usually drawn from the business community, an arrangement that provides the private sector a direct hand in college policy-making and gives them insights into the services that the colleges can provide. 15

Other benefits also accrue to college, industry, and the community-at-large. For instance, the college receives revenue, fulfills its mission, develops and forges linkages, gains access to modern equipment, enables faculty to up-grade hands-on skills, enhances job opportunities for students as well as hands-on experiences, and is able to tap industrial resources such as personnel to teach in an adjunct capacity.[16]

Industry, on the other hand, also enjoys certain gains. Training is able to be provided at a realistic cost. In most cases, community college training costs are lower than industry costs. Monies saved from such training can be diverted into R & D efforts, thereby helping the company. (It is estimated that ATT spends approximately $1 Billion on its world-wide training and development efforts.) Moreover, industry is able to hire additional, better qualified entry-level persons; receive tax advantages--able to write-off equipment donated to colleges; participates in the actual training by using the skills of in-house personnel, thereby reducing the actual on-the-job training; develops a pool of trained manpower; and stabilizes labor-union management.[17] Furthermore, advisory board membership often a prerequsite of many programs are filled with capable and knowledgeable industrial representatives willing to undertake college-

related assignments to develop curriculum and to improve instruction.

The community-at-large attracts its share of benefits too. Community residents are provided with the necessary skills to become gainfully employed. With skilled employees, industries are more likely to remain in the community rather than move to areas where employees are more plentiful. Not only do local industries remain in these areas but new industries are attracted to such communities. As a result, new monies flow into the community; tax bases remain secure and in some cases expand; and public services continue to be provided to the community at reduced costs.[18]

Conclusion

The community college has a distinct role in working cooperatively with the business community. Since the community college for the most part serves as a training ground for entry level employees it is a unique position to work with industry. The relationship between these two entities, colleges and industry, are mutually complementary and serve to forge a common bond. Benefits derived from from such an arrangement enable both to develop and prosper.

Endnotes

1 Putting America Back to Work: The Kellogg Leadership Initiative: A Report and Guide book (Washington, D.C.: AACJC, 1984), pp. 5-9.

2 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

3 Daniel Bell, Coming of a Post-Industrial Society (New York: Basic, 1976).

4 Alvin Toffler, The Third Wave (New York: Morrow, 1980).

5 Mary Jane Jackman and James R. Mahoney, Shoulders to the Wheel, (Washington, D.C.: AACJC, 1982), p. vii.

6 M. Ross Boyle, "Sensible Response to Hard Times," Community and Junior College Journal, (November 1983), p. 15.

7 Jackman and Mahoney, p. vii.

8 Boyle, p. 16.

9 James R. Mahoney, Community College Centers for Contracted Programs: A Sequel to Shoulders to the Wheel (Washington, D. C.: AACJC, 1984), p.10.

10 Boyle, p. 17.

11 Jackman and Mahoney, p. viii.

[12] Edward B. Fiske, "Booming Corporate Education Efforts Rival College Programs, Study Says," New York Times, 28 January 1985, p. A.10.

[13] Richard E. Wilson, "Collaboration with the Private Sector," Community and Junior College Journal (September 1981), p. 2.

[14] Wilson, p. 2.

[15] Jackman and Mahoney, p. 9.

[16] Jackman and Mahoney, pp. 42-43.

[17] Jackman and Mahoney, p. 43.

[18] Jackman and Mahoney, p. 43.

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